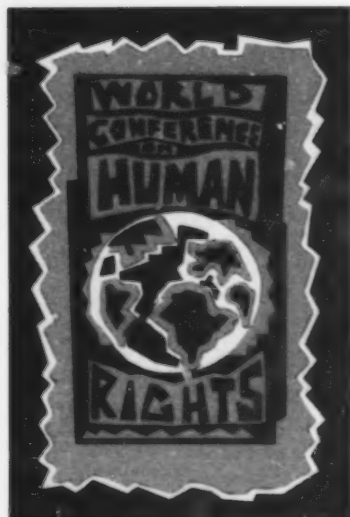




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WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The right to family planning has been recognized by the international community as a human right for over twenty years. The last International Conference on Human Rights, in Teheran in 1968, endorsed the statement that "parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children". This was reaffirmed in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 1984 International Conference on Population and the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is dedicated to making the right to family planning a reality for individuals world-wide. This includes support for the provision of family planning information and quality services. It also involves promoting social change in order to enhance and secure women's status in society independent of motherhood.

UNFPA takes an active part in calling attention to the discrimination women suffer in vital aspects of their lives. The Fund maintains that the denial of reproductive self-determination and neglect of reproductive health are an affront to human dignity and individual as well as communal well-being. Public resource allocation is rarely adequate to protect women's most basic rights to physical integrity and security. Pregnancy and childbirth kill over half a million women every year, the vast majority in developing countries. In fact, the disparity between maternal death rates in developed and developing countries is greater than for any other health indicator.

The Fund has worked consistently over more than 20 years to increase political support for effective measures to secure women's reproductive rights as a fundamental human right. Central to all other elements is the ability of women to have full control over their fertility, which requires that family planning information and services be provided with utmost respect for voluntarism and attention to high-quality care. Reproductive choice enables women to pursue a wider range of opportunities and to increase their participation in public life. Family planning is therefore an essential means of enhancing women's autonomy. It also has a bearing on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, infertility, sexual health, child survival and safe motherhood. Population policies promoted by UNFPA seek to guarantee for women the human rights to equality, health and reproductive choice.

These efforts have received strong support in the international community. The 1984 International Conference on Population asserted

that the "ability of women to control their own fertility forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights; likewise, the assurance of socio-economic opportunities on an equal basis with men and the provision of the necessary services and facilities enable women to take greater responsibility for their reproductive lives". Another recommendation states that efforts to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality should "support family planning as a health measure in maternal and child health programmes as a way of reducing births that occur too early or too late in the mother's life, of increasing the interval between births and of diminishing higher birth orders, and by giving special consideration to the needs of those in the post-partum and/or breast-feeding period".

The Amsterdam Declaration of 1989 emphasized the imperative need to "recognize that women are at the centre of the development process and that the improvement of their status and the extent to which they are free to make decisions affecting their lives and that of their families will be crucial in determining future population growth rates".

Urging Governments

The central position of women in population policies and in development in general was further underscored in General Assembly resolution 45/216 of 21 December 1990. The resolution asserts "the crucial importance of resource investments in health and education, especially for women, for the success of population programmes, and urges Governments of developing countries to strengthen, according to their economic and social capacities and conditions, their political and financial commitments to investments in the social sector, and



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also urges Governments of developed countries, as well as concerned international, regional and non-governmental organizations, to strengthen their financial and technical support, in the areas of health and education, to respond positively to requests for population assistance and to increase significantly the proportion of their assistance destined for population activities."

In accordance with these international instruments, UNFPA-funded projects seek to improve the situation of women through education, training, skill development and economic activities. The Fund is also a sponsor of the Safe Motherhood Initiative, which focuses on the needs of women, particularly girls and adolescents, and on the provision of quality maternal/child

health care and family planning services. In order to increase the knowledge base on women, UNFPA works closely with the United Nations Statistical Office in disseminating data on women and development. UNFPA also supports efforts of the Statistical Office to ensure that in all national data collection activities, information is collected on a gender-specific basis.